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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
Dana P. Jacobson, Publisher/Managing Editor
Joseph Mirando, Managing Editor
Rob Mahlert, Associate Editor

Atari Online News, Etc. Staff

Dana P. Jacobson -- Editor
Joe Mirando -- "People Are Talking"
Michael Burkley -- "Unabashed Atariophile"
Albert Dayes -- "CC: Classic Chips"
Rob Mahlert -- Web site
Thomas J. Andrews -- "Keeper of the Flame"

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~ Virtual Sex, Real Split ~ World of Warcraft Blitz ~ USB Atari Joystick!

-* New Net Neutrality Bill Soon *-
-* FDR Used Radio, Obama To Use the Web *-
-* Military Launches TroopTube, Bans YouTube! *-

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->From the Editor's Keyboard

"Saying it like it is!"

"-----"

Well, the post-election celebrations are over, and "things" are back to "normal" as far as I can see. Wall St. is still crashing, businesses are still closing, more and more people losing their jobs, and more homes being foreclosed. And of course, it will be you and me who will be paying for it. Imagine that! Here in Massachusetts, finances are in a troubled state of affairs. So, let's raise tolls and other "non-taxes" that they have enjoyed doing under similar circumstances in the past. How about taking some fiscal responsibility first!? Fortunately this doesn't go into effect just quite yet, and needs a final vote next year. But, the point that raising taxes is usually the first things that our lawmakers come up with!

So, of course this makes things difficult on all of us financially. Like many people, I've been looking for "real" work for awhile now. As time has gone on, finding something has taken on more urgency, especially in today's economic conditions. I've also been trying very hard to avoid tapping into my 403b and pension plan. So, after not hearing any positive news regarding my last batch of job attempts, I decided to apply for a job that doesn't pay all that much, but does provide some steady income. So, at least I'll be working, something that will help make things a little easier around here, and will give me a little breathing room to continue to look for something "better". We'll see how that goes.

Thanksgiving is rapidly approaching. Hopefully, we're all in a position to still be thankful for something this year. Personally, my family is still healthy, and I still have a house to live in. I hope it continues.

Until next time...

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Another week has come and gone, and the election and it's excitement are over. Now begins the hard work of

making at least some of those promises come true. I'm not saying that the promises were lies, but I'll bet that there are a lot of things that are going to be much harder to implement than expected for a variety of reasons.

It seems that everyone's got their hands out... hands in our pockets, is more like it... and instead of worrying about the big things (multi-hundred-million dollar bail-outs and excruciatingly expensive wars), the powers that be want to concentrate on knocking down the small stuff... the crumbs that you and I get... you know... Infrastructure, education, social security, etc.

Well, enough politics for this week... there's something else I want to gripe about this week...

Text editors.

All I want... all I need to put this column together is a simple ASCII text editor that will wrap text for me. It's not so much of a pain for me if it doesn't wrap text, but poor Dana, who has to put the damned magazine together, appreciates it if there are defined stops. I had a very good text editor that came with my Linux distribution and the desktop I normally use, KDE. It was part of the KDE suite of utility applications. KDE (K Desktop Environment) has undergone a version upgrade, and the app that I liked using, kedit, is no longer supported.

No problem, I thought. I'd just load up one of the many other text editors available and use it just like kedit.

No such luck. None of them seem to like doing 'static' or 'hard' word-wrapping. I never thought of that as an odd request. Microsoft's NOTE PAD didn't do it either, but hell, it was Microsoft. Know what I mean?

So, after going through all of the text editors I could find, even my namesake, 'joe', I found that none of them really did word wrapping well. NOW what am I going to do? Well, what I'm using now isn't really optimal, but it'll have to do for the time being. If worse comes to worst, I may just have to load up an Atari ST emulator and beg Dan Wilga of Gribnif Software for a copy of STeno... that's what I used the whole time on the ST/Mega/MegaE/TT.... And I was very happy with it.

Progress ain't always for the best. This I know. But it amazes me that something as simple as hard wrapping text goes un-implemented. Oh, there are a couple of apps that TRIED to implement it, but they have an annoying glitch: when you come to the end of a line and it wraps text, it moves the part of the word you're typing to the next line, then it resets the cursor to the beginning of the line... I know it's hard to visualize, but if you have access to kate, gedit or kwrite, try it out and you'll see what I mean. It's very annoying.

Hmm... where's Dan Wilga's phone number? I know I had it here somewhere...

Another thing I'd like to mention is that Thanksgiving is coming up, and there are plenty of people in need out there. If you think of it, buy an extra can of veggies, cranberry sauce, a box of rice or bag of beans, and donate them to your local food-share, soup kitchen or civic group. You don't have to donate a turkey. If you can swing it, by all means do, but canned and dry goods are always in need too, and will last much

longer. And cash is always good... write out a check for five or ten bucks and bring it with you to the grocery or department store when you go. It won't be long before we start seeing people outside collecting for charities. Just write in the name of the group on the check, drop it in the box or hand it to them, and your canceled check will be your receipt for tax purposes. Of course, if you can swing more than five or ten bucks, by all means do so. This is going to be a rough season for a lot of people, and donations are going to be needed for everything from food to clothing to heating oil. Remember how it was in the early 80's with the church soup kitchens and the food-share pantries? Well, we're going to be seeing it again. If not this holiday season, then the next... No, this is not over. Not over by a longshot. Our recovery is going to take years, not weeks. So be a good guy/gal and kick a couple of bucks to the charities even if you're not in the greatest financial position yourself (and who among us IS these days?).

Okay, that's enough for now. Let's get to the reason for this column in the first place... the news, hints, tips and info from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup

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'AtariNut' asks about converting graphics files:

"What's the method or software used to convert other picture formats (jpeg, gif, etc.) to img in order to use them for desktop wallpaper?"

Jo Even Skarstein tells AtariNut:

"I've always used ImageCopy for this."

Rodolphe Czuba posts this about the CT63:

"I may produce some CT63's.
If you want one (if you're SURE you want one), please contact me ASAP."

Mark Duckworth tells Rodolphe:

"I love my CT60 and it would be nice to buy another CT63 and falcon, but Falcons are going for \$400+ on eBay and are way too expensive. I'm really not even sure who is buying them! Add to that \$200+ for another CT63, tower case, etc, and there is simply no way I can sneak this past my sanity checker (wife). Anyway, I have 2 TT's a Mega STe (and a spare fried mega ste board that I can ravage for parts) and ST's are pretty easy to find.

What are the chances that we could get a CT60 for TT? I know this was discussed repeatedly and you said no before, but maybe worth bringing up again. You know I think people with TT's would be willing to send you perhaps 250+EUR for a TT accelerator since we would be just that happy

A Mega STe 68030 board with fast ram Mega STe/TT VME video card
ST RAM expansion (16MB) ST 68030 board...
Newer faster DSP for falcon/ct60 to play with DSP card for TT
IDE for any of the above accelerators.

And finally - very interesting to me. A powerpc expansion for the falcon. Similar to the blizzard cards for the amiga. It'd be nice to have a way to get us all used to PPC to move on the platform in the future. The coldfire is very expensive and as tested barely has more power than a CT60. Maybe it would be better to develop for old apple g3/g4's but just feels fake.

I can't help but to think that after the CT60, such a board would be easy for you, and I also can't help but to think every single person who bought a CT60 from you has at least one lonely ST lying around that would love to scream in ST high with XaAES and MiNT on it and plenty of spare RAM.

It's just an idea and of course you should work on what you want to.

I know someone made some board called the Magnum for Mega STe which allowed 16MB of ram, but I wouldn't be able to buy this right now for any amount of money. A sad situation, especially when you query ebay for amiga accelerators and ram boards. Even original A500 can easily have 8MB.

I am curious above what you think of all of this and what you want to do in the future."

Dr. Uwe Seimet, author of HD Driver, posts this about FAT32 with MiNT:

"To Jean-Luc and everybody who contributed to the discussion of MiNT not accepting a FAT32 partition of 4095 MB created by HDDRUTIL:
I finally checked HDDRUTIL's FAT size calculation and did not find anything wrong, even though MiNT reports "FAT too small".

Let me summarize the calculation, so that you can comment on it:

When creating a FAT32 partition of 4095 MB HDDRUTIL allocates 8386528 sectors of 512 bytes for the FATs and the actual data area. 8174 sectors are allocated for each FAT, which means that $8386528 - 2 * 8174 = 8370180$ sectors remain for the actual data. There are 8 sectors per cluster, which means that there are $8386528 / 8 = 1046272$ data clusters. For each of these 1046272 clusters a 32 bit FAT entry is required, which means that $1046272 * 4 = 4185088$ bytes are needed per FAT. This is exactly what 8174 sectors per FAT amount to: $8174 * 512 = 4185088$.

This calculation shows that the number of FAT sectors allocated by HDDRUTIL is exactly the number of sectors needed.

If my calculation is right MiNT is wrong and should be fixed. If my calculation is wrong please point out the error so that I can fix my code."

Jo Even Skarstein tells Uwe:

"I took the liberty to forward this to the MiNT-list, in case there is a bug in MiNT."

Uwe replies:

"Thank you. I guess this will result in this problem being resolved

soon."

Jo Even asks Uwe:

"Are you a member of the MiNT mailing list? Frank Naumann posted a reply today:

"What about the two empty (unused) entries at the start of each FAT table?"

I don't have a clue what you're guys are talking about, but as he's the one who's written the FAT-code in MiNT he does at least know how MiNT expects things. I suggest you contact him so you can sort out the correct way to calculate FAT size."

Uwe asks Jo Even:

"Are they (the two unused entries) present in FAT32 tables? (Is there a document that says so?)

I do not have his current email address. Can you please give him my email address that he can contact me?...

...After rethinking this I think they must be present, indeed. I will try to check that.

Anyway, it might be a good idea to talk to Frank about this."

After thinking about the problem and doing some math, Uwe comes back and tells Jo Even:

"For now there is no need anymore to contact him. After sitting in front of my TT with a pocket calculator I figured out what was wrong in my FAT size calculation. The bug is fixed now and MiNT is happy again. The new release HDDRIVER 8.23 is already available. Details are available on <http://www.seimet.de/atari/en/hddrivernews.html> "

I just love a happy ending, don't you? [Grin]

Well, that's it for this week, friends and neighbors. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - 'Mirror's Edge' Is Innovative!

World of Warcraft Blitz!
EA Jumps into Fitness!
And more!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!

'Mirror's Edge' Is Innovative

Occasionally, a video game will reshape the way gamers see virtual worlds. Much like "Wolfenstein 3D," "Super Mario 64" and "Half-Life" before it, the stunning first-person action-adventure game "Mirror's Edge" (Electronic Arts, for the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3, \$59.99) smashes the conventions of its predecessors.

As a superagile courier named Faith - who's usually being chased by bad guys - players can run, walk, leap, hop and slide across rooftops, within warehouses, through sewers and inside office buildings. Faith's goals are never more complicated than getting from Point A to Point B. How she accomplishes that is where "Mirror's Edge" comes alive.

Created by Swedish video game developer DICE, "Mirror's Edge" mimics real-life running - complete with panting sounds. There's no on-screen meters, so the minimalist display lets players' eyes focus on the game's parkour-inspired moves. (You know, that froggy style of movement made famous by "Casino Royale" and all those soda and sneaker commercials.)

Luckily, the free running isn't disorienting. It's liberating, especially when players gain enough momentum to acrobatically parlay a series of maneuvers into an impromptu ballet, resulting in a spring from a construction crane or lunge toward a helicopter. Of course, the fear of going splat or being shot to death by your pursuers is omnipresent.

To keep the action moving, objects and surfaces that Faith can bounce off of or use to her advantage glow a distinct shade of candy apple red and are usually easy to spot within her sterile urban environment, which resembles what it might look like if Ikea erected a city in Japan. Once you get the hang of the light-footed game play, it's strangely blissful.

Players can also tackle what few foes get in Faith's way and apprehend their firearms. However, guns sorta seem to slow her down. Ultimately, this game is all about the chase. So, with the tap of a button, she'll toss weapons aside and continue on her way, making "Mirror's Edge" a surprisingly nonviolent yet continually adrenaline-pumping affair.

"Mirror's Edge" isn't perfect. The story line is pedestrian and the wannabe anime cutscenes aren't compelling. Tapping the bumper button to vault or wall climb don't always seem to elicit the desired response, which can send Faith tumbling to her death - and force players to restart the sequence.

Those issues aside, the game's 10 chapters will definitely leave players craving more places to lunge and run. Innovative games like "Mirror's Edge," with a sleek "Fifth Element" aesthetic and "Run Lola Run" sense

of urgency, don't come around very often. It would probably be a mistake to let such a visionary piece of work pass you by. Four stars.

'World of Warcraft' Blitz on Game Fans

Top video game maker Activision Blizzard on Thursday launches a new extension of its record-breaking "World of Warcraft" which already has a claimed 11 million players worldwide.

"Wrath of the Lich King" releases in Europe and the United States at midnight in what has been called "the next epic chapter" in the life and times of Azeroth, a medieval fantasy world that smartly links into affairs of the real universe.

While the game world remains similar from day to day, seasonal events such as Halloween, Christmas, Olympics have been added, regional editions modified - in China flesh was placed on the living dead - and pop culture celebrities such as Jean-Claude Van Damme or William Shatner used to sell it.

First released in 2004 in North America and 2005 in Europe, the online role-playing game sees competitors line up as members of eight races divided into two opposing good and evil factions, the Alliance or the Horde.

"It's not a game, it's a world," says Blizzard, "a living breathing online adventure world of myth and magic."

The "Lich King" throws adepts into a new cold and inhospitable environment set four years after the previous extension and ruled over by Lich monarch Arthas Menethill.

In gaming terms, players can increase the powers of their character avatars to a level of 80, compared to 60 when originally launched and 70 on the launch of the first extension "The Burning Crusade" early 2007.

It also throws out a new race of super-heroes, the Deathknights.

Following on the huge sales of "The Burning Crusade", which sold 2.4 million copies on the first day of release, Activision Blizzard, which is owned by French group Vivendi, is organising a giant launch campaign.

Stores around world over are being decorated in "World of Warcraft" colours.

In Paris two stores on the Champs-Elysees boulevard are being dressed up as either of the Alliance or the Horde, with senior producer John Lagrave on hand. In New York, Blizzard co-founder Mike Morhaime will be at Times Square for the launch.

EA Jumps into Fitness Products

US videogame publisher Electronics Arts on Thursday moved to get couch potatoes on their feet and exercising more than just their thumbs with a

fitness product similar to Nintendo's "Wii Fit."

EA Sports Active is an "innovative new customizable and personalized fitness product" that will be available in stores in March and cost 60 dollars, the Redwood City, California-based company said.

EA, the market leader in sports videogames with such titles as Madden NFL, PGA Tour and NASCAR, said EA Sports Active was aimed primarily at women and would operate on Nintendo's Wii console.

It said the workout regimen had been "developed in collaboration with fitness experts," including Bob Greene, the personal trainer to talk show host Oprah Winfrey.

"We have a real opportunity to redefine the home fitness experience with a more Western cardiovascular approach and exercises that will appeal to a diverse audience," EA Sports president Peter Moore said.

The company said EA Sports Active would be the first in a new line of EA fitness and sports performance products that would get "people off the couch and into shape."

Nintendo recently launched "Wii Fit" videogames that employ the console's motion-sensing Nunchuk controllers and a pressure sensing balance board the shape and size of a typical bathroom scale to get people conditioning their bodies with exercises such as running, yoga, and push-ups.

EA said EA Sports Active comes with two leg straps to hold the Wii's Nunchuk controllers and a resistance band to track upper body exercises.

Feedback such as the number of calories burned and instructions on technique is provided on-screen.

Video Game Sales Soar in October

Despite a slowing economy, sales of U.S. video games and hardware soared 18 percent from the same month a year ago, according to data released Thursday by market researcher NPD Group.

Hardware sales were up 5 percent to \$494.7 million, led by Nintendo's Wii game console. Wii held onto the top spot by selling 803,000 units in October, up from 687,000 in September. The Wii, which has been plagued by shortages, has sold more than 13 million units since its release in November 2006.

Microsoft's Xbox 360 held onto the No. 2 spot by selling 371,000 units, a 7 percent increase over September following a price cut that month. Sony's PlayStation 3 came in third with 190,000 units sold, an 18.2 percent increase over the prior month.

Software sales were up 35 percent to \$696.8 million, led by Microsoft's Fable II, which sold 790,000 units. Second place went to Nintendo's exercise game Wii Fit, which sold 487,000 copies.

Meanwhile, sales of portable video games were down 14 percent.

The video game industry faces a tough holiday shopping season, following a bankruptcy filing by retailer Circuit City and a revenue warning from rival Best Buy.

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->A-ONE Gaming Online - Online Users Growl & Purr!

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Classic Atari-style Joystick Goes USB

Legacy Engineering Group has released a USB joystick that looks and performs just like the joystick included with the classic Atari 2600 video game console. It costs US\$14.99.

The stick is a standard USB input device, and incorporates a single fire button. No drivers are necessary; it works out of the box with Mac OS X, Windows and Linux operating systems.

The stick is ideal for MAME and other emulation software products designed to enable old arcade and computer games to run on the Mac, according to the company. It also works with commercially-released games that support joystick or gamepad input.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Sun To Help Old Foe Microsoft Get Search Traffic

In its latest move to increase Internet search traffic, Microsoft Corp. has turned to an old rival, Sun Microsystems Inc., for marketing help.

Under the terms of a deal being announced Monday, Sun will promote a Microsoft toolbar for the Internet Explorer browser to U.S.-based Web surfers as they download Sun's Java software - which is required to view some Web sites. The toolbar has a built-in box for queries to Microsoft's Live Search and buttons that give people access to MSN content.

"We need to provide more volume to our advertisers," said Angus Norton, a senior director in Microsoft's Live Search group. Microsoft ranks a distant third in the Web search market behind Google Inc. and Yahoo Inc.

Sun and Microsoft have competed bitterly on several fronts. In particular, Sun was one of the most prominent antagonists in Microsoft's long antitrust battles. In 2004, Sun reaped nearly \$2 billion in a patent and antitrust settlement payout from Microsoft.

Sun and Microsoft did not disclose the financial details or the length of their new deal. It comes as Sun is struggling mightily, having posted a \$1.7 billion loss in its most recent quarter.

Through the agreement with Microsoft, computer users installing the Java software will be able to check a box to get the MSN toolbar, too. (As the programs download, Sun also opens a window promoting OpenOffice programs - a free competitor to Microsoft Office software.)

Sun has struck similar deals with Google and Yahoo in the past. The Yahoo agreement, which offers a Yahoo search toolbar to people who use the Firefox browser, will continue, but the Google deal is ending, said Sun's vice president of Java marketing, Eric Klein.

Microsoft is trying several ways of getting unstuck from third place in the search market.

After Redmond, Wash.-based Microsoft dropped a bid to buy Yahoo in May, it vowed to invest in its own search technology and spend money on deals aimed at attracting more Web surfers.

The most prominent deal so far calls for Hewlett-Packard Co. to make Microsoft's search engine the default on all PCs shipped in the U.S. and Canada, starting in January. HP will also include a browser toolbar on those computers.

Microsoft is focusing on toolbars and default settings because, according to Norton, 35 percent of Web searches are conducted from the browser's address line, built-in search boxes and add-on search toolbars, as opposed to a search provider's Web page.

U.S. Lawmaker Plans Bill on Web Neutrality

A senior U.S. lawmaker plans to introduce a bill in January that would bar Internet providers like AT&T Inc from blocking Web content, setting up a renewed battle over so-called network neutrality.

Sen. Byron Dorgan, a North Dakota Democrat, believes a law is essential to prevent telephone and cable companies from discriminating against Internet content, even though regulators have taken actions to enforce free Web principles, a top Dorgan aide said on Thursday.

"We feel that legislation is definitely necessary," said Frannie Wellings, telecom counsel to Dorgan, speaking at a University of Nebraska law school event on changes in telecom law after the election of Democrat Barack Obama.

Dorgan has been influential on the issue, and will be among the highest ranking Democrats on the Senate's Commerce Committee when it reconvenes in January.

The net neutrality fight pits Internet service providers (ISPs) like

AT&T against content companies like Google Inc and Microsoft Corp.

The ISPs, which also include Verizon Communications Inc. and cable company Comcast Corp, say they need to manage the ever-growing traffic on their networks without government interference.

Content companies say the ISPs hold too power much to block or slow down traffic requiring more bandwidth, such as movie downloads, or certain content altogether.

President-elect Barack Obama supports net neutrality legislation. The election of Obama and more Democrats who back the concept adds momentum to the cause, Wellings said.

A recent Federal Communications Commission decision ordering Comcast to stop impeding the sharing of certain content between users proves regulators already have the authority, an AT&T official said.

"The current (FCC) principles already deal with unreasonable discrimination," said Jim Cicconi, AT&T executive vice president for regulatory affairs, pointing to the Comcast case.

The public would not pay for its Internet services if AT&T discriminated against content, he added. "We'd be shooting ourselves in the foot."

Comcast is suing the FCC over the issue, and much depends on the outcome of that case, experts said. If the court sides with Comcast, legislation will become much more likely.

"The telephone and cable companies say trust them," said Markham Erickson, director of the Open Internet Coalition, a trade group that lobbies for net neutrality, with members such as Google and eBay Inc. "We will trust but verify."

After Banning YouTube, Military Launches TroopTube

The U.S. military, with help from Seattle startup Delve Networks, has launched a video-sharing Web site for troops, their families and supporters, a year and a half after restricting access to YouTube and other video sites.

TroopTube, as the new site is called, lets people register as members of one of the branches of the armed forces, family, civilian Defense Department employees or supporters. Members can upload personal videos from anywhere with an Internet connection, but a Pentagon employee screens each for taste, copyright violations and national security issues.

Part of Delve's work was to build speedy tools for approving and sorting incoming videos. Its technology also crunches video files into several sizes and automatically plays the one that best suits viewers' Internet connection speeds.

But the startup's real forte is making sure searches on the site turn up the best video results. Delve's system turns a video's sound into a text transcript. It pares unimportant words like "this" and "that," then compares what's left against a massive database of words commonly uttered in proximity to each other, collected from crawling hundreds of

millions of Web pages.

The result: Even if speech recognition software trips on the one word someone is searching for, there's a good chance Delve can still deliver relevant results.

In May 2007, the Defense Department banned employees and soldiers from accessing sites including YouTube and MySpace, citing security and bandwidth issues. Delve Chief Executive Alex Castro called TroopTube a "retention tool" aimed at a generation of soldiers who bring laptops to the front lines.

"A lot of people are excited in the company to be doing something for the people who make sacrifices," said Castro, his eyes tearing. "We're proud of this."

InfoWorld Says Windows 7's Not That Fast

While many of those who have played around with the early version of Windows 7 have noted that it feels pretty zippy, especially for a pre-beta version, InfoWorld says early benchmarks show the software is just on par with its predecessor.

In an article on Monday, InfoWorld said that Windows 7 is a "virtual twin" of Vista when it comes to performance.

On the one hand, this could be seen as bad news, considering Microsoft's efforts to position Windows 7 as better performing. At the same time, this is a pre-beta version. Early releases often lag in performance since optimizations tend to be among the later steps in operating system development.

For its part, Microsoft is encouraging folks to withhold judgment.

"Microsoft consistently encourages people to hold benchmark tests until software is finished and ready for broad release," Microsoft said in a statement to CNET News.

I've been using Windows 7 for a couple of weeks on a loaner machine from Microsoft (a Lenovo X300). It does feel considerably faster than my work machine, but that's a several-year-old IBM ThinkPad T42. And, as a colleague points out, a new Windows image often feels fast, until you load all of your usual add-ons and third-party software on top of it.

I will say, the new Windows has been incredibly stable for an early build. I used it a bunch at PDC and WinHEC and am currently using it as my main machine. Most things I have tried are working, including the software I use every day, such as iTunes and several IM programs.

On the not-so-hot list, I haven't gotten it to work with my Sprint wireless broadband card. I also haven't been able to connect to CNET's VPN, meaning I've been using Outlook Web Access as opposed to the real thing. But to me, the testament to Windows 7 is that I still want to use it, even though Outlook Web Access is way less convenient than Outlook itself.

I'll be interested to see if Microsoft continues in the right direction

with its broad beta, which is slated to be released early next year, as well as whether it hits its internal goal of shipping Windows 7 in time for next year's holiday shopping season.

AVG Antivirus Update Mistakenly Deletes System File

An update for the AVG 8 antivirus software for Windows 2000, XP and Vista released Saturday mistakenly warned that the Windows system file user32.dll was a Trojan horse. The problem affected the Dutch, French, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish versions.

AVG Technologies immediately corrected the problem for both free and paid versions of its software. If users acted on the update's warning, the user32.dll file was deleted, leaving Windows XP systems endlessly rebooting or unable to reboot.

The Czech-based AVG posted details of the problem and a method to fix it on the AVG Web site. The fix involves disabling AVG services and copying the user32.dll file from the Windows installation CD - but only if the PC was not rebooted.

The effect on Windows Vista systems, if any, was not clear.

A company representative said, "AVG is actively working to remedy the problem some users are experiencing related to the most recent update to commercial and free versions of AVG 7.5 and AVG 8.0 in some languages. A number of users who installed the update mistakenly received a warning that the Windows system file user32.dll product version 5.1.2600.3099 was infected with a Trojan virus and were prompted to delete a file essential to the operation of Windows XP."

Palin Email Hack Trial Delayed Until 2009

The trial of 20-year-old college student accused of hacking into Gov. Sarah Palin's Yahoo e-mail account has been delayed until May 2009.

A judge in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Tennessee moved the trial of David Kernell from December to May 19, 2009 after the government said it needed more time to sift through the evidence.

"Because of the nature of this case, significant forensic evaluation is required [and] the parties agree that - an extension should be granted to allow counsel the reasonable time necessary for effective preparation," according to a November 4 filing from the U.S. Attorney and the Department of Justice.

Kernell, a student at the University of Tennessee and the son of Tennessee state Rep. Mike Kernell, a Democrat, turned himself in to authorities on October 8. He is accused of hacking into Palin's "gov.palin@yahoo.com" e-mail account on September 16 by successfully navigating Yahoo's password recovery system.

If convicted, he faces up to five years in prison, a \$250,000 fine, and three years of supervised release. He is accused of gaining unlawful

access to stored communications and obtaining information from a protected computer via interstate communication.

The government said Kernell's legal team raised no objections to delaying the trial. Kernell's lawyers did, however, try unsuccessfully to have the case thrown out in an October 27 filing, arguing that the government was trying to convict Kernell of a felony when he was guilty of a misdemeanor, if anything.

Kernell was charged with accessing a computer without authorization and obtaining information, which is usually considered a misdemeanor, according to the filing. Though this statute can be elevated to a felony if combined with other crimes, Kernell's team said the government is charging Kernell with additional crimes that are identical to the original crime simply to obtain felony status.

The indictment is "factually duplicitous," his lawyers argued.

The two parties will meet on March 9 for a pre-trial conference and motion hearing.

Google Adds Video and Voice Chat to Gmail

Google Inc added a voice and video chat feature to its Gmail email service on Tuesday, launching a free Web-based service that competes with the likes of eBay's Skype.

Gmail and Google App subscribers can now choose to speak with friends on a video screen and simultaneously instant message them in a Google Chat box.

The video screen can be popped out of the chat box and moved around a user's computer screen. Users can also change the size of the screen and expand it to full-screen size.

"The idea was to make it quicker and easier to communicate with other people by whatever means is best convenient," said Google spokesman Jason Freidenfelds.

"It's a nice alternative for businesses looking for another way for people to connect," he added.

The feature is available for both PC and Apple computer users.

A webcam and small web browser plug-in are required to use the video chat. Users who do not have a webcam will still be able to chat with friends by voice.

Security Alliance Slashes Spam, Closes Malware Host

The Internet is a little less jammed with spam after a cybercrime group blew the whistle on one of the biggest offenders. HostExploit, an alliance of volunteers who work at Google, McAfee and Arbor Networks, has been tracking and documenting cybercrime activity and its latest effort slashed worldwide spam by 50 percent and junk e-mail by 75 percent.

The alliance this week released its Cyber Crime USA report pointing to McColo, a San Jose, Calif.-based Web hosting service, as one of the biggest spam offenders. The company used servers which depend on U.S. transit peers, according to HostExploit, and beyond spam, McColo was also sending malware and hosting child-pornography sites.

HostExploit tracks cybercrime using several measurements, according to spokesperson Jart Armin. "We came up with the world's biggest spam botnets were hosted by McColo," Armin said in a phone interview. "Of course, what we came up with was 24 botnet links and lots of malware and loads of Trojan horses."

The group found that 40,000 visitors per day were lured to fake Web sites and paying for antivirus software that didn't exist. While downloading this fake software, the sites would steal information from computers, including credit-card numbers and other identifying information.

"We also found 40 child-pornography Web sites and payment systems for those," Armin said. "It's a lot of work to put this together and expose it." But it was worth it when McColo's Web site was shut down by its two Internet service providers, Hurricane Electric and Global Crossing, Armin added.

This isn't the first time HostExploit has come to the rescue. In its first report, the group focused on Activo/Interchange, which resulted in a 10 percent drop in spam and malware worldwide.

The group said it's the members' duty as Internet security specialists to be responsible and blow the whistle on cybercrimes.

"If you look at the Association of Computing Machinery code of ethics, it says as professionals if we know things are wrong, we should do things about it if it does harm to others," Armin said. "Obviously it is an ethical point, but it is also a case of professionalism. It is our Internet as well."

HostExploit, however, does not act to stop cybercrime other than urging the Internet service providers to consider action.

"Most of these problems are not originating in the U.S.; it's in Russia and Europe," Armin said. "We don't pull the plug, we provide the information to the main transits or peers - in this case, Hurricane Electric - and they checked it and they pulled the plug."

The latest report is only the tip of the iceberg, according to Armin.

"These guys ran a dirty operation," said Jose Nazario, a security expert with Arbor Networks. "With McColo gone off the air, I do not suspect I'll find little to do in the coming weeks, months and year; the badness they hosted will simply move."

And when they do, HostExploit will be ready. Once the group determines the host, it can track who is controlling the operation and where it will come from next.

"It's an overall war; this is just a battle," Armin said.

Google Tracks Flu Outbreaks Through Search Queries

Google is putting the power of the Web to work in tracking the onset of influenza in the United States, tracking patterns in search queries to determine the spread of the disease.

Google Flu Trends, a new tool unveiled by the Internet giant on Tuesday, counts the number of flu-related queries on the Google search engine and provides estimates on influenza outbreaks in the 50 US states.

"We found that there's a very close relationship between the frequency of these search queries and the number of people who are experiencing flu-like symptoms each week," Google said in a posting on its official blog.

"If we tally each day's flu-related search queries, we can estimate how many people have a flu-like illness."

Google said it had shared its results with the Atlanta-based US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which does its own flu tracking.

"It turns out that traditional flu surveillance systems take 1-2 weeks to collect and release surveillance data, but Google search queries can be automatically counted very quickly," Google said.

"Together (with the CDC) we saw that our search-based flu estimates had a consistently strong correlation with real CDC surveillance data," it said.

The company cautioned that Google Flu Trends, which can be seen online at google.org/flu_trends, is "still very experimental," but said it could possibly be a useful tool in prevent the spread of other diseases.

"By making our flu estimates available each day, Google Flu Trends may provide an early-warning system for outbreaks of influenza," the Mountain View, California-based company said.

"For epidemiologists, this is an exciting development, because early detection of a disease outbreak can reduce the number of people affected," Google said.

"Our up-to-date influenza estimates may enable public health officials and health professionals to better respond to seasonal epidemics and - though we hope never to find out - pandemics," it added.

Influenza is responsible for some 500,000 deaths around the world each year.

Obama Will Take to Internet as Roosevelt Took to Radio

Barack Obama's Internet-savvy campaign team will revolutionize White House communications like late president Franklin Roosevelt (FDR) did with the radio, according to NDN think tank president Simon Rosenberg.

"Senator Obama just ran the first true campaign of the 21st Century

using these internet tools to help organize his supporters and fight on a new battlefield of modern politics, said the veteran of former president Bill Clinton's 1992 election campaign.

"He reinvented the model of advocacy," he added of the Indiana Senator who on Tuesday won became the first US black president elect.

Obama's campaign team used the Web to organize volunteers and in fundraising, dealing a decisive victory over his Republican rival John McCain, who resorted to more traditional methods of communications.

Rosenberg said the incoming US administration had significantly revamped political communications in the country and lowered the barrier to entry into politics for everyday people.

"It allows a much more meaningful participation by our citizens in their politics and democracy. We saw an enormous surge of civic participation in America this year, in terms of people giving money and voting.

"All future campaigns in America will be run on this people-based internet model Obama ran," he said.

He said the use of modern 21st-century tools will bring "an enormous reinvention" of the US presidency, as the radio did in the first half of the last century.

"FDR was using the radio in a very powerful way to establish his power in his country. In the US, now, every Saturday morning the president does a radio address.

"My assumption is that it will now be a YouTube address that will be translated in the principal languages of the world: Spanish, French, Arabic, Farsi and others.

"This way (the president) will be addressing not only his own citizens but the citizens of the world.

Rosenberg said the new technology will not only change the relationship between the US president and his own people, "it is going to change the American relationship to all the world ...

"It's going to be exciting to some governments, not so exciting to others."

As to whether the White House will be setting an example for other democracies to follow, Rosenberg predicted first there would be "a period of massive experimentation not only in the US but also in the rest of the world.

"Every elected leader in the world is going to want to try to use these tools at their own advantage there is no doubt about this.

"David Cameron, the leader of the Tories (in Britain), has done amazing YouTube videos way more creative than anything anybody in the US has done," Rosenberg said.

A British woman is divorcing her husband after discovering his online alter-ego was having an affair with a virtual woman in the fantasy world of Second Life, media reported on Friday.

Amy Taylor, 28, said her three-year marriage to David Pollard, 40, came to an end when she twice walked in on him watching his online character, Dave Barmy, having sex with other virtual women.

Second Life enables players to create online lives in which their virtual alter ego, or avatar, can socialize, develop relationships, buy property and set up businesses in an imagined world using the game's virtual currency.

The couple met in an internet chatroom in 2003 and married in real life and in a fantasy tropical setting in Second Life.

However, Taylor always had suspicions about Pollard's online loyalty. At one point she hired a virtual detective to test whether his avatar was cheating on her, after finding him at the computer watching his character having sex with a prostitute.

Pollard passed that honeytrap test but earlier this year Taylor found his character in a compromising position with another virtual woman.

"He confessed he'd been talking to this woman player in America for one or two weeks and said our marriage was over and he didn't love me any more," said Taylor, who filed for divorce the next day.

"The solicitor wasn't at all surprised - she said it was her second divorce case involving Second Life that week."

EBay Vendor Passes Gigantic Feedback Milestone

If you've ever sold something on eBay, you may have been pleased to receive positive feedback from the buyer. Multiply that by a million, and you can imagine how Jack Sheng feels.

Sheng, 33, owns Los Angeles-based Eforcity Corp., which has been selling electronics accessories on the online auction site since he started his business in 2000 with two childhood friends. In the past two months, four separate eBay user IDs belonging to Sheng and his company each surpassed more than 1 million feedback points. No one else on eBay has come close.

eBay sellers can get a positive feedback point from a buyer by sending items quickly, having them arrive as advertised and helping to solve any issues that come up. Those positive customer points are offset by any negative ratings the seller receives.

Eforcity employs almost 200 people, which is many more than it had eight years ago. Back then, it was a part-time job for Sheng, who used to work as a technology consultant for PricewaterhouseCoopers. After about two years, he and his friends began working full-time on Eforcity and hiring other employees.

Sheng realized about six months ago that Eforcity would probably hit the

1 million feedback marks this year. "It's a great morale booster for our employees," he said.

His advice for new eBay sellers? Find your own niche.

"If early on if we'd tried to sell electronics rather than electronics accessories, we might be out of business right now," he said.

Sheng is a ways ahead of the No. 2 feedback holder on eBay, a DVD and CD seller with a score of about 754,000.

eBay planned to honor Sheng in a ceremony at its San Jose, Calif., headquarters Thursday afternoon, with Chief Executive John Donahoe in attendance.

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